



Raw Milk Fact Sheet

1. **What is raw milk?** Raw milk is milk that has not undergone pasteurization (flash heating) to kill harmful germs, especially bacteria, or dairy products that are made from raw milk.

2. **Can raw milk and unpasteurized cheeses cause disease?** – Yes. While milk is one of the most nutritionally complete foods, adding high-quality protein, fat, milk sugar, essential minerals, and vitamins to our diet, raw milk and unpasteurized cheeses may contain bacteria or other types of microbes that will cause serious human disease.

3. **What is the potential health impact of drinking raw milk?** - It has long been known that raw milk is capable of transmitting tuberculosis, brucellosis, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and Q-fever to humans. Pasteurization was developed because of the risk of acquiring tuberculosis from milk consumption. Before pasteurization was widely employed in the 1930's, one quarter of all foodborne disease in the United States was linked to the consumption of raw milk and/or raw dairy products.

4. **What microorganisms are currently linked to drinking raw milk?** - Diarrheal microorganisms linked to the consumption of raw milk are: *Campylobacter*, *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus*, and *Yersinia enterocolitica*. Fortunately, the threat of these diseases and the number of disease outbreaks involving raw milk and milk products were greatly reduced by pasteurization. Since 2007, in Pennsylvania over 6 large disease outbreaks involving over 300 persons have been linked to raw milk consumption, involving either *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter* bacteria.

5. **Can these illnesses be dangerous?** - Infection with these bacteria leads to diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, headache, and vomiting that typically lasts anywhere from several hours to a week or more. While most healthy people will recover, these diseases can be very dangerous for people at the extremes of age, with weakened immune systems and pregnant women.

6. Who should always avoid the consumption of raw milk or raw dairy products?

- a. Pregnant women or women considering pregnancy.
- b. Children under 5 years of age or the elderly.
- c. Anyone who is immunocompromised (Persons with cancer, organ transplants, HIV, or on certain medications that suppress the immune system).

7. How does raw milk get contaminated? Milk contamination may occur from:

- a. Feedlot and/or pasture filth contamination (e.g. vermin droppings or manure),
- b. A lactating dairy cow that is shedding the organism but not ill,
- c. Pus from a bacterial infection within the lactating cow's udder (mastitis),
- d. Surface contamination of the cow's teats during the milking process,
- e. Improperly sanitized equipment used in milking, storing or transporting the raw milk, and
- f. Inadvertent cross-contamination by humans or equipment,

8. How does pasteurization increase the safety of dairy products? – During pasteurization, raw milk is briefly heated to 161°F for 15–20 seconds and then rapidly cooled. This will destroy 99.999% of any harmful bacteria that may contaminate raw milk. Many negatives are being assigned to the pasteurization of milk. Little, if any of it, is supported by the literature currently available. The benefits of pasteurization far outweigh any possible nutritional harm.

9. For more information about raw milk:

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.

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